



Lee County Library System

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COMPOSING YOUR TO-DO LIST: TACKLE THE BIGGER CHALLENGES EARLIER IN THE DAY

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The research is in, and homo sapiens are definitely more adept at tackling big challenges earlier in the day than later. Peak energy and alertness for most people is at 8 a.m. Also, fewer interruptions are likely earlier in the day. This is not to say you can't be effective handling large tasks later in the day, and sometimes you have no choice but to do so. The long-term odds of success, however, are with you when you make a note of handling the day's biggest challenge as early as you can, perhaps as the very first thing.

When composing a to-do list, regardless of what order you listed the items, when you have identified the vital challenge you face for the day, circle it, or draw an arrow from it up to the top of the page, indicating this is the task you will tackle first. Then, clear away any minor hurdles that would impede your ability to start on this project.

Do you need to rearrange your workspace accordingly? Okay, go ahead and do so; not to stall, but because you will literally be making logistical changes to your workspace that aid in the way you perform best. Do you need to alert others that you do not wish to be distracted? Okay, go ahead and do so, because clear stretches give you your best chance of being productive, especially when you are tackling a project that is new, requires highly creative thinking, or is sufficiently unfamiliar to you.

Each distraction, however fleeting, may turn into a full-fledged interruption. Interruptions in and of themselves are not so bad, on average lasting only three minutes. A bigger problem, however, is that a typical interruption leads to other activities that can last 12 to 14 minutes. So, any interruption could pull you from the task for up to 16 minutes.

You're more prone to be distracted as the day goes on versus early in the morning. So, you have compelling reason to tackle the biggest and worst of the tasks before you, as early as you can get to them. Thereafter, no matter how difficult the challenge was, as you've experienced so many times before, once you finish something that at first may have seemed intimidating, the whole day tends to go better.

Early, major victories have a way of impacting the rest of the day. Freed from psychological baggage of handling the task, as well as the mental and physical effort necessary to do so, you then almost automatically consider "what other great things can I accomplish today?"

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electrifying professional speaker, making 806 presentations.

He is the author of "Breathing Space,"

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Jeff has been widely quoted in the Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Christian Science Monitor, New York Times, and USA Today. Cited by Sharing Ideas Magazine as a "Consummate Speaker," Jeff believes that career professionals today in all industries have a responsibility to achieve their own sense of worklife balance, and he supports that quest through his website www.BreathingSpace.com. ♦

